HOUSE of the SUN

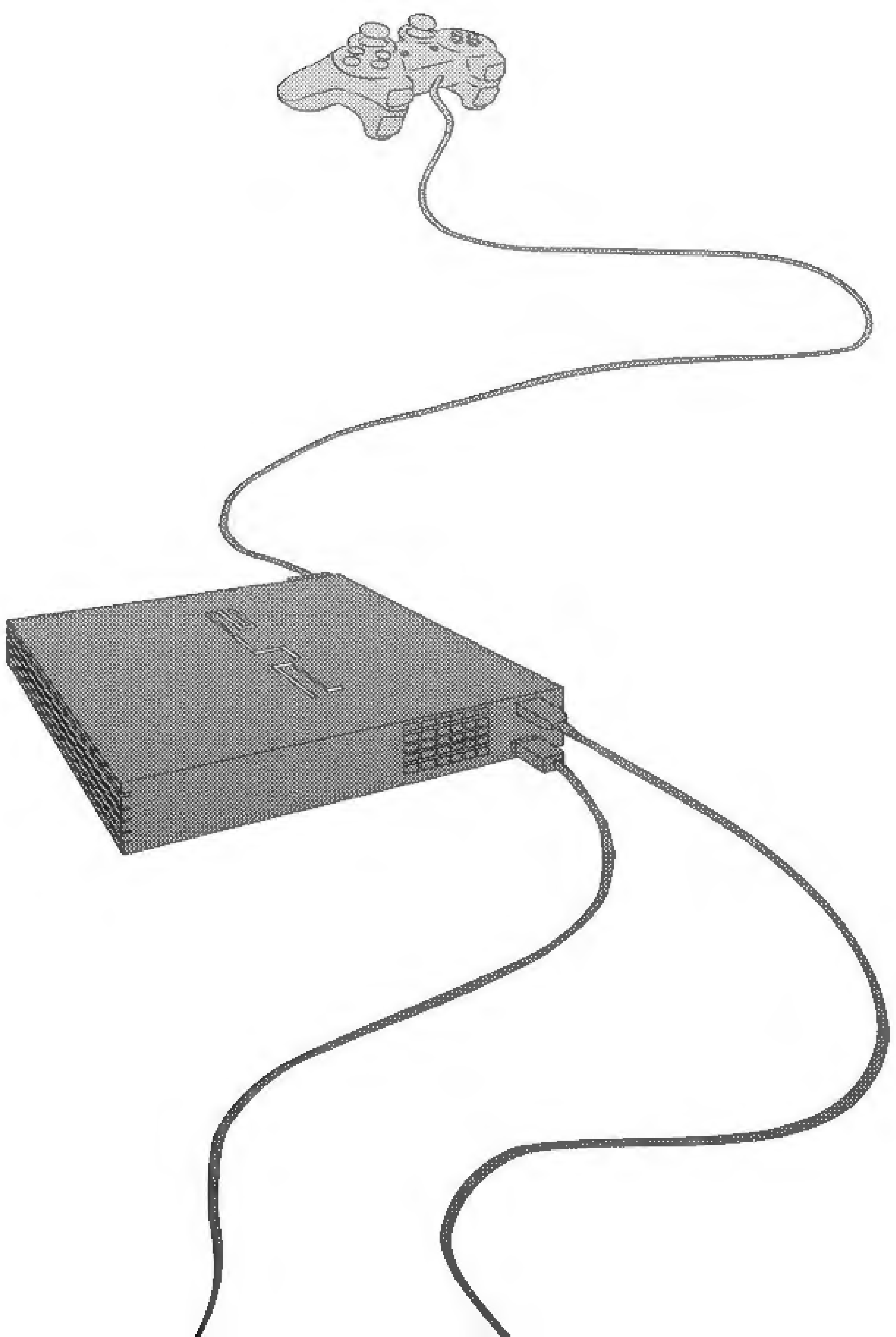
4

Taamo

HOUSE of the SUN

4

by Taamo



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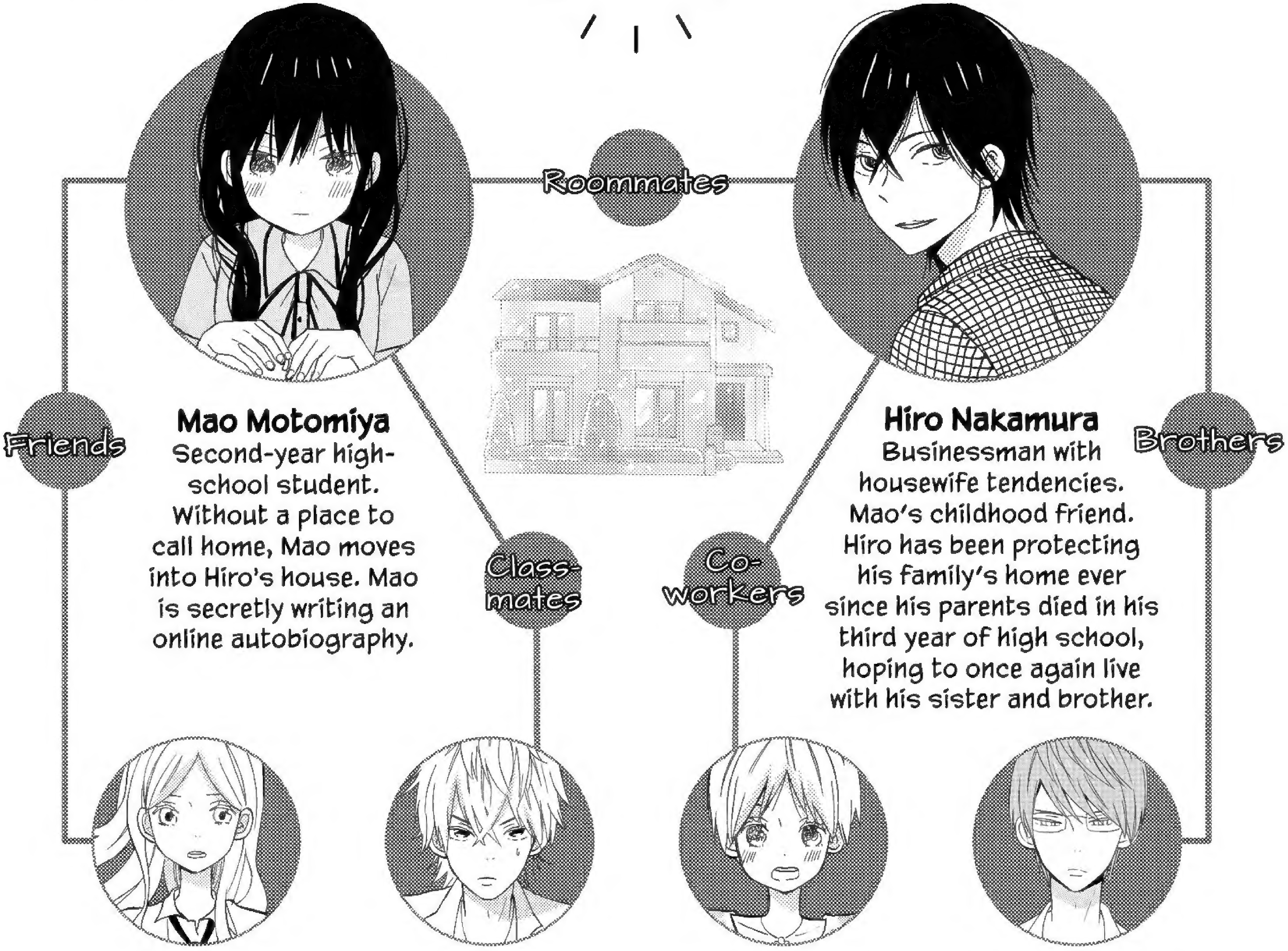
CHARACTER



Mao Motomiya
Second-year high-school student. Without a place to call home, Mao moves into Hiro's house. Mao is secretly writing an online autobiography.

Hiro Nakamura
Businessman with housewife tendencies. Mao's childhood friend. Hiro has been protecting his family's home ever since his parents died in his third year of high school, hoping to once again live with his sister and brother.

Chi-chan
Mao's friend, who is in a different class. She likes Oda-kun.

Oda-kun
Mao's classmate since first year. He confessed his love to Mao and got rejected, but he isn't giving up.

Sugimoto-san
Hiro's coworker. She's a fan of Mao's novel. Her nickname is "Radical." She likes Hiro.

Daiki Nakamura
Hiro's little brother. In his second year of high school. He moved in with an uncle after their parents died. His taste is similar to Mao's.

STORY

After her father gets remarried, Mao feels like she no longer has a home and ends up moving in with Hiro, her childhood friend.

Mao falls in love with Hiro, who is kind and takes care of her.

She doesn't want Hiro to take pity on her, so she decides to move back home.

She meets with her father, but he turns her away.

Mao is confused because she is neither Hiro's family nor his girlfriend.

At that moment, Hiro's brother Daiki appears once again...

story 13

A Part-time Job

Hello, my name is Taamo.

It was summer break,
so I couldn't write Volume
Four, and I felt very lonely.

I missed drawing Mao
in her school uniform
due to it being summer
break in the story.

But lately it's also
been fun to draw her
in street clothes!

I couldn't draw
Mao in a skirt in this
book so I'll have her
wear one for the
title pages and
illustrations.

I realize it myself.
I'm just appealing to his kindness.
While I do want to tell him how I feel...
I just want to stay by his side without saying anything at all.

I don't support it.
I can't speak.
Whatever I say...
...will just sound like an excuse.
Move over.

バタン…
SLAM
...
Is it...
...really okay for me...
...to stay here?
KERCHAK
ガチャ

What are you doing?
Hurry up and come in.
I thought he was going to tell me to leave.
TAP TAP
カチカチ
Hey, Croquette.
WOOF
わんっ
わんっ
WOOF
So this is Croquette?
TAP
TAP
カチカチ

Yes.
Did Hiro tell you?
She's super cute.
Not especially.
It's just a doggy.
Just a doggy?
CLICK
パチン
I texted Hiro that I'm back.
What's that?
Cream puffs.
Try some...
I'm home!
H-Hiro.
Welcome back.

Daiki!
You should've let me know sooner that you were coming home.
SIGH
You're home late. Were you out drinking?
SLOSH SLOSH
コポコポ
Yes, with a coworker.
You were with a girl, right?
What's with you?
There were two guys and one girl, but the other guy had to leave.
It wasn't anything.
I wasn't judging you.

Well, excuse me. And what about you? How's your love life?
Don't lump me in with those other morons, will you?
I've never heard of you having a love life, anyway.
どん
BOOM
It's completely non-existent!
Don't act haughty.
I heard that a female coworker was writing a novel, and I was curious about it.
...
Hmph...
Well, I guess it doesn't matter.
I told you via text already, but I'll be spending summer break here.

I... I see.
ブホッ SPIT
What did I just eat?!
What did you make this time, Mao?
Chi-chan's special cream puffs.
Chi-chan said she's good at cooking.
I see...
Huh? Oh... It's edible, at least.
Soy sauce?
もしゃもしゃ MUNCH MUNCH
Are you serious?!
That's poison! You can't call that food!
It's black!
You won't survive in this house if you say things like that.

Mao's in charge of the household chores on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.
And you have to eat all the food.
I'll take care of it then!
You're going to take over for me?
You should be happy.
Why do you look like you're raring for a fight?
Hiro's been eating this stuff?
...
It's black!
It is black...
Hiro.
It doesn't seem like anything happened with Radical-san.
I'm glad.

I'm glad.
It's a relief.
I'm sorry.
zzz
She's sound asleep. She must've been tired.
Her head's heavy.
...

Hina...
She's preparing for entrance exams, so she'll be staying over there.
I see.
Hina...
...doesn't want to come back to this house, after all.
...
Mao...

She tried to move back home.
She went about it on her own.
But it didn't work out.
I'm begging you, Daiki...
Please let Mao stay here.
...
Do what you want.

キラリラリーーン
SPARKLE
The house is... sparkling...
Grr...
I did some morning cleaning.
And I made breakfast, too.
I was picturing breakfast at the Kitano Hotel.
I don't get it, but that's amazing!
So let me do the chores on Tuesday and Wednesday, Mao!
バーンッ
SLAM
I'm not listening.
This is delicious!
Not really.
Hiro, I'm going to work part time while I'm here.

What? A part-time job?
Yes, as a private tutor for elementary school students.
A friend asked me to do it.
Wow! That's just like you.
I'm terrible at teaching others. I admire you.
Maybe it's just not your thing.
What's that supposed to mean?!
...
A part-time job, huh...
I've gotta find a job, too.
TAP カチ
TAP カチ

There are so many...
カチカチ
TAP TAP
This looks fun.
Company name
Civil-war-era restaurant-bar-Bushido
Job title
Hall/Kitchen staff
Job description
Wear a warrior costume and wait on customers.
Hiro and Radical-san went to a civil-war-era restaurant, too.
Mao! Are you really gonna start working over summer break starting tomorrow?
Chi-chan.
Yeah. I want to save money.
The cream puffs were a hit.
How admirable.
Maybe I should get a job, too...
Me, too! Me, too!
Don't butt into our conversation!
I wasn't talking to you.

I know.
You're in love with Mao, right?
Hey!
...!
Mao already likes someone else.
Be quiet! You don't know anything!
I said that because I do know.

What are you trying to say?
You're an idiot!
...
What!
Be nice!
Bye.
ガタッ
CLATTER
Hey! Where are you going?
だだだっ
TMP TMP TMP
What's with her?
A part-time job?

Yeah.
I already passed the interview.
What kind of job?
Um...
It's at a convenience store.
A convenience store, huh?
There's no way he'd let me work at a restaurant-bar.
...
Mao.
If you need money...
ぐっぐっ
GOB GOB
I'm fine.
It's already decided.

Cro-quette.
キャッ
YAP YAP
Daiki and Mao are getting jobs.
...
Hiro, you've been working, too.
All this time.
True...
What are you worried about?
Nothing.
...
...

Welcome!
Welcome!
Thank you!
Thank you!
Great job. This is a civil-war-era restaurant, so you have to speak like a warrior.
The costume suits you.
Understood!
Wow... Thank you for getting into character.

Please follow him around for now.
His name is Aoi Matsumoto.
NOD
Here's some info about the menu, the tables, and so on.
Work is hard!
There are so many types of sake!
Let's go make our rounds.
Understood!
I, Mao Motomiya, cast my eyes upon you.
There's no need for that now.
Hiro...
I wonder if he's okay.
He had a strange look on his face.

Ugh.
...
Hi...
Huh?
He's new, too. Please try to get along.
I'm Daiki Nakamura.
Nice to meet you.

What?
Daiki?
What happened to being a tutor?
Where are your glasses?
They're disposable.
Be quiet! What about the convenience store job?
Hiro would never allow me to work at a restaurant-bar.
And the money is better here.
Same for me.
But it's true that my friend got me the job.

Good-bye
Thanks for your hard work.
Wait up, Daiki.
Let's walk home together.
たたた，
TMP TMP TMP
...
Um...

Hiro...
...was acting strange.
Do you think he'd prefer it if we didn't work?
Of course.
He's had to tough it out and work all this time.
He doesn't want us to go through that, too.
I see.
You have a crush on him but still didn't realize that?
He's never been home much.
...
Mao.

I'm not saying you shouldn't have a crush on Hiro.
That's up to you.
I just don't want you to cause him any extra stress.
He makes it look like nothing, but he's sacrificed a lot to protect our home.
As long as you're living in that house, you're family.

Okay.
Thank you, Daiki.
For saying I'm family.
It wasn't me.
If Mom were alive...
...she'd ask Mao to stay for dinner.
But I should hurry...
Because I'm not family, I have to hurry...
...and move out of this house and be independent.

戦国
Take care of the rest.
Understood!
ガショ
CLATTER
CLATTER
ガショ
Looks delicious, right?
Leftover fried chicken
It looks yummy.
Excuse me!
CHOMP
CHOMP
ぱくぱく
Please wait a moment!
I'll go.

Go hide.
?
?
Daiki?
Aren't you working as a tutor?

Hiro!
What is he doing here?
So this is your little brother?
I'm helping out a friend.
Radical-san is here, too.
This must be the place they came before.
It's not just the two of them...
I drank too much.
That's a relief.
Hiro...
...is with Radical-san.

It's the first time...
...I've seen them together.
...
Oh! A female ninja!
Eek!
ガシッ
GRAB
Come with me, ninja girl!
The girl we came with was asking if there were any female ninjas.
H-he's Hiro's friend!
No way! I'll be found out!
Please let me roam free!
What are you saying?

Sir, your friends are calling for you.
Thanks, Daiki.
No problem.
They're all colleagues.
And they're drunk.
He didn't see you, so don't worry.
O...okay.
Sorry.
Thanks.
Wow! That's so cute!

This is cute.
Do you think it would suit me?
What is he buying for her?
That reminds me, he bought me that cute Chonmame doll.
Hiro is the type of guy who likes to buy presents! That must be it!
Argh! I'm an idiot!
Waaaaaah!
I'm a jealous fool!
But Hiro is free to do what he wants.
But... But...
Waaaaah!

いかやき
五平餅
あめ玉
*Grilled squid
Why is it only today that I don't finish at the same time as Daiki?
So lonely...
Oh, a festival.
It's a clear night.
I'll buy something to bring home for everyone.
That should make them happy.
What should I get for Hiro?

What is this?
It's so fun.
広島焼
*Hiroshima-yaki (Hiroshima-style okonomiyaki)
りんごあめ
*Jumbo skewers
Doing something with family...
...makes everyone happy, no matter how small they are.
Seeing others smile...
焼そば
どんぐり
*Donburi
That must be why...
...Hiro bought so many cream puffs...
...even though I told him I didn't want any.

What are you doing?
Mao.
甘栗
?
What's with all that food?

自慢
We're going to eat it.
No way, you idiot!
Don't call me an idiot.
Woof!
What is Croquette wearing?
I found it at the shop we just went to.
It's cute, right?
It is...
Why are you crying?
I'm not crying!
Hiro is silly.

Let's walk around a little.
All right.
Silly.
Silly.
I love him!

story 14

Change

ジャンボ串焼
いかやき
五平餅
Fireworks Festival
花火大会
8月 日
あんず
Did they revive the fireworks festival?
You're right.
I used to come here all the time as a kid, but then they stopped having it.
It brings back memories.
...
...

*Rice cakes, Grilled squid, Jumbo skewers

Let's go together this year.
What? The three of us?
The three of us... That's fine, too.
Wear a *yukata**, okay?
お好み
I don't have one!
They make cheap ones now.
I'm saving my money!
*A yukata is a summer kimono.
Yukata... We have some at home.
Oh, right...
Your mother's *yukata*?

Yeah.
甘栗
Woof!
きゅん YAP
きゅん YAP
きゅん YAP
Don't bring a dog somewhere this crowded.

ぱっ
SNAP
Daiki.
You're finished with work?
Yup.
...
So what's with you working at that restaurant?
My friend's parents own the place.
They needed a tall warrior.
LOOM ばーん
A tall...
Mao! Did you know that this guy wasn't working as a tutor—
Mao?
You're turning into a candy apple.
赤
BLUSH
Maybe it was a misunderstanding.
Really? It was a total lie.
Anyway, looks like I can keep my job.
Hiro...

He let go of my hand in front of Daiki.
Maybe...
...he's embarrassed.
CRUNCH ガリ
CRUNCH ガリ
CRUNCH ガリ
CRUNCH ガリ
Hey, Daiki, remember the fireworks festival by the river?
They're starting it up again this year.
We were just talking about going, all three of us.
Why would I go with my brother at this age?
Woah. No need to get angry. It's fine if you don't want to.
I didn't say I don't want to!
So you want to come?
It'd be nice if Hina-chan could come.
クレープ
チョコバナナ
You're stinky.

*Crepes (right sign)
*Chocolate bananas (left sign)

We're happy to go with you, Mao.
As for Hina...
We can go with her when she moves back home.
Yeah.
DING
Oh, a text.
What are you doing with so many shopping bags?
I could say the same to you.
FLIP
You can't eat all that.
I'll eat it Tuesday and Wednesday.

1/2500
From
Subject

I went to eat with my crush again today.

Are you free Saturday BTW?

I want to throw a little party for Ma-kun.

Want to join me?

Ugh... That's right!
Ha ha ha
Hee hee hee
She was just with Hiro!
Hiro, you idiot!
Huh? What did I do?
I know...
...I'm the one...
広島
そば

...who's an idiot for not saying anything.
Fireworks Festival
花火大会
8月
Why are you in such a daze?
Walk properly!
Oh, a fireworks festival?
Why don't you invite her?
Mao-chan.
I don't know her e-mail address.
Or her number.
Ah! Just ask her, you coward!
Be quiet!
Oh...
But...

I was near her house once.
Welcome, Kukai-san.
DATE*
Please eat as much as you can today!
Wow, that's a lot of food. Did something special happen?
She's so cheerful!
August 3rd is Ma-kun's birthday, according to the old calendar.
Let's celebrate.
Congratulations.

*References Masamune Date, abbreviated as Ma-kun.

According to the new calendar, his birthday is September 5th, so we'll celebrate again then.
O... okay.
I guess you didn't know, huh?
Oh, I still don't know Nakamura-san's birth date... I wonder when it is.
DATE
...
Hiro's birthday is in May.
I went to the civil-war-era restaurant with Nakamura-san again.
Though... there were three of us this time.
Nakamura-san seems to like that place!
Kukai-san, I'm sure you'd like it, too. You're 17 years old now, right?
I have to tell her.
As things are now, there will be trouble again, like with Chi-chan.

I'd planned to tell her everything today.
I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't go to that restaurant anymore.
Huh?
It's fine if you come, Radical-san.
But please don't come with Hiro.
DATE
DATE
Hiro?
The truth is, I'm working at that restaurant.
I'll get in trouble if Hiro finds out.
He'll get angry at me for working at a restaurant-bar while I'm still in high school.

DATE
Kukai-san? I don't understand what you're talking about.
To be blunt...
The guy you like, Nakamura-san, is the same guy I live with and have a crush on, Hiro.

Um...
Um...
But Nakamura-san lives with his little sister.
...
...
I'm sorry. I just can't believe it.

In other words...
Nakamura-san is in love with you, Kukai-san?
Not at all!
He rejected me when I told him how I feel.
But I still like Hiro...
I was worried there was something going on between you two...
You were worried?
About me?

I've never even dated before, you know?
I have zero self-confidence...
I've never even been rejected.
'Cause I've never confessed my love to anyone.
But...
For the first time...
...I was going to tell him how I feel.
I'm sorry.
I can't give up on him, either.

Why?
"I'm sorry."
There's no reason for Radical-san to apologize.
キイ
CREAK
キイ
CREAK
Now...
...I guess I've lost a friend.
I left her house, but...
I wonder if that was the right thing to do?

♪でっでででで
でででで♪
RRRRRRRR
Hello?
Chi-chan?
Mao? Are you okay?
Yeah.
Did you hear about the fireworks festival?
Huh!
My mom can help us get ready.
Mao?
What's wrong?
Did something happen?
Yeah.
I told Radical-san...
...about Hiro.

I see.
You did good, Mao.
You did good!
Yeah.
At this moment, Radical...
...must be eating all that food.
I wonder how she's feeling.

Knowing her...
...she must be hurt...
...and she must be crying.
...
ばく
CHOMP
ばく
CHOMP
CHOMP
ばく
CHOMP
ばく
...
*Civil war era
戦国

Welcome!
Whoa!
BAM
どたっ
…
びっしゃあ
SLAM
What are you doing?
I tripped.
I can see that!
Hee hee hee
はっ
HUH
Thank you for coming!
That warrior is soaking wet.

Mao-chan, take care of the *Date Room.
Got it!
Thank you for waiting!

*Once more, "Date" refers to Masamune Date, Sugimoto's idol.

M-Master Radical...
Kukai-san.
You really do work here.
Indeed, I do.
My apologies. I'll get another server.
Please wait.
Huh? What? You know her?
I'd like to order.
Grilled beef tongue and a large glass of Sangoku.

Simmered beef tongue.
Um...
The Date spicy fried chicken thighs.
Please just don't talk to him...
...about the online novel.
Mao?
You, too? Did you conspire with Daiki?
I'm sorry.

My apologies. We're from the same neighborhood.
Sugimoto-san?
I was hoping...
...that it was a lie...

W-what's wrong, Sugimoto-san?
Nakamura! What should we do? It seems she knows the waitress...
Huh?
She said something about an online novel.
Do you mean the one Sugimoto-san is writing?
I have no idea! She just said something about a Kukai-san.
Solami?
It was online.
I met Solami online.

What? You mean that Solami-san?
From that blog I was reading? Really?
We'll talk about this later.
Get back to work.
I always thought Solami-san would be someone like Sugimoto-san.
There haven't been any updates lately, but I always read it.
I'm sorry for suddenly bursting into tears.
I think I drank too much.

Thank you...
...for being a fan...
...of the novel.
...
Mao! What are you doing?
If you're not going to work, let the others know!

I can't believe it... But it's true after all, huh?
Sugimoto-san really is the author of that novel.
Huh...
And I can't believe you know Sugimoto-san, Mao.
And read her novel.
SHAAA
That stuff about her family.
That stuff really drew me in.
I can relate to Solami-san's feelings towards her family.

...
とて
とて
とて
CLACK
CLACK
CLACK
ギィ
CREAK
Why are you being so quiet, Mao?
Of course I'm angry at you for lying about working at a restaurant-bar.
But I would've allowed it if I knew it was with Daiki.
Still, what's with Daiki saying that stuff about not treating you like children and interfering so much?
He's just a kid.
It has nothing to do with work.
Then what is it?

I won't be seeing Sugimoto-san anymore.
I don't think she'll agree to see me.
Is that...
...something I can bring up in conversation?
Give her advice, maybe?
It doesn't concern you!
urk!
Hiro, you're a special-ultra-miracle-super-hyper idiot!
It's gross that you read an online novel!
But...

Good night.
Mao!
ばんっ
SLAM
...
BANG
...

Just act like you normally would, Daiki.
…
SMOOSH
ぼすっ
Like playing games…
What's that supposed to mean?
I won't say it's annoying.
Don't walk into a teenage boy's room without knocking!
What if I wasn't playing a game?
…
SOB
SOB
SOB
SOB
うーうーうーうー
…
Everything was demolished again!
I got caught?
Darn it, I'm trailing behind.
TAP TAP TAP
カチャカチャカチャ
WAIL
うー

You really don't want Hiro to know you're crying, huh?
I'm just wailing.
You certainly are wailing.
In that case, you might as well challenge me to a game.
ばりっ
RIP
コンコン
KNOCK KNOCK
Daiki, is Mao in there with you?
すぱっ
OPEN

We're playing a game, so don't come in.
Huh?
Hey, Mao.
It's been a while since we played against each other.
...
SOB
ぐす
All right, let's do this.

Thank you...
Daiki.
...
Mao...
Is she still crying?
It must be about Sugimoto-san, after all.

Were they friends?
But she doesn't have many friends.
Maybe that's why she's so sad.
If I told her there's nothing going on between us...
...it would carry too much meaning.
There's nothing I can say.
Motomiya

So this is the Motomiya household.
I'm sure me showing up so suddenly will be a surprise.
But I don't know her contact info.
I wonder if her parents are home...
I'm so nervous...
ピンポーン
DING DONG

story 15

An Unforgettable Day

I thought I could make her happy.
What's wrong, Motomiya-san?
ビーーッ
BEEP
ビーーーッ
BEEP
ビーー
BEEP
BEEP
ビーー

Urgh... It hurts.
It hurts...
I wanted to see you so badly, it hurts.
My heart!
Jeez.
Don't be ridiculous.
I'm being serious.
You're not giving me enough tender loving care.
When I get out of here, let's go on a date.
I've got a boyfriend! I told you not to be so ridiculous.
I'm being serious.

Her name was Yuzuno Hironaka.
We were inseparable since middle school.
Even though each of us had a boyfriend or girlfriend, we always stayed friends.
We always joked around together.
And before we knew it, we had grown into adults.
Probably because she lived nearby, I came across her while she was crying.
She wasn't the type to cry, not even at graduation, so it was my first time seeing her like that.
Urk! I can't believe I let an idiot see me!
Why are you crying, Yuzuno?

It doesn't concern you, you idiot!
...
Of course it does! We're friends!
...
I don't want to tell you,
Motomiya-kun!

When I saw Yuzuno's tears...
...she transformed from a friend into a woman.
So what I said felt like a contradiction.
It's ridiculous for us to go on a date.
I thought you were being ridiculous when you were admitted to the hospital, too.
But you came anyway.
ズルー SIP
We're celebrating your recovery!
We've known each other for a long time, but we've never gone out anywhere...
...together.
That's not the kind of relationship we have.
ガタッ CLATTER
I have to go to my part-time job.
Part-time job?
Aren't you a nurse?
...
Bye.

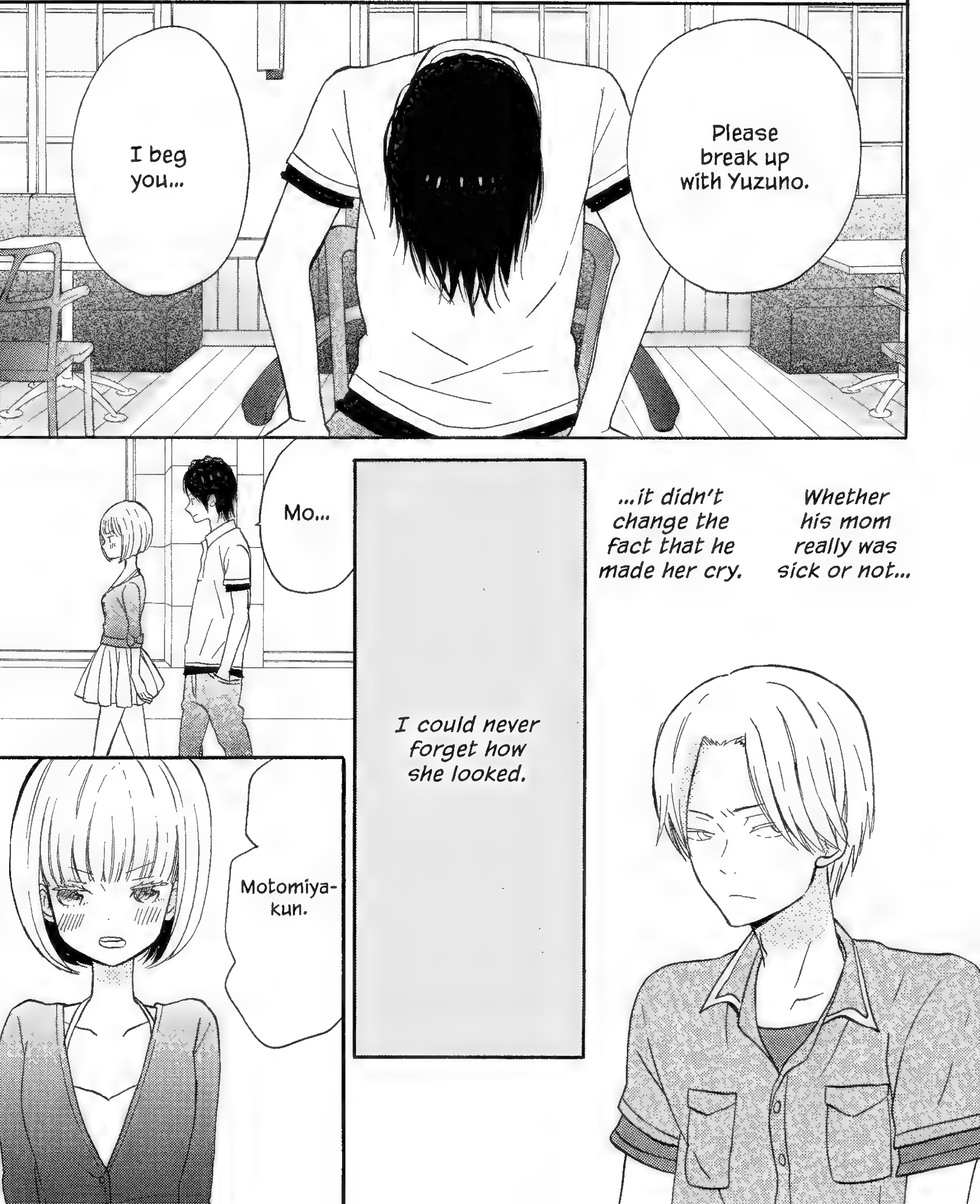
Yuzuno was always running around, busy with work, like she was struggling financially.
She could've come to me, but she never told me what was going on.
Just...
"Help me."
She probably would've thought it was ridiculous...
But it felt to me like she was saying that.
Hey! Why are you following me?
I've got stuff to do around here.
You lying idiot!
Why...

She works in this kind of place...
It feels surreal.
I'm warning you, this place is expensive.
Yeah.
It sure looks like it.
Are you an idiot?
You know I am, right?
ゴク GULP ゴク GULP ゴク GULP ゴク GULP
Hey, are you okay?
urgh, urgh.
It hurts...
You drank too much.
It's better for you if I do, right?
But you don't have any money.
焼肉
居酒屋
酒菜
飲み放題

You...
...work too much...
My boyfriend's mom is in the hospital.
He needs money.
No matter what it takes.
...
But I've never met his mom, and he hasn't even told me the hospital's name.
Yuzuno, that's...
It's okay.
You can say it.

I think you're being tricked.
...
Ha, ha, ha.
Right?
I'm totally getting played.
Ha, ha.
I believe in us.
I believe in us.
I believe in us...

Surely, just that feeling was enough to bring us together.


Please break up with Yuzuno.
I beg you...
Whether his mom really was sick or not...
...it didn't change the fact that he made her cry.
I could never forget how she looked.
Mo...
Motomiya-kun.

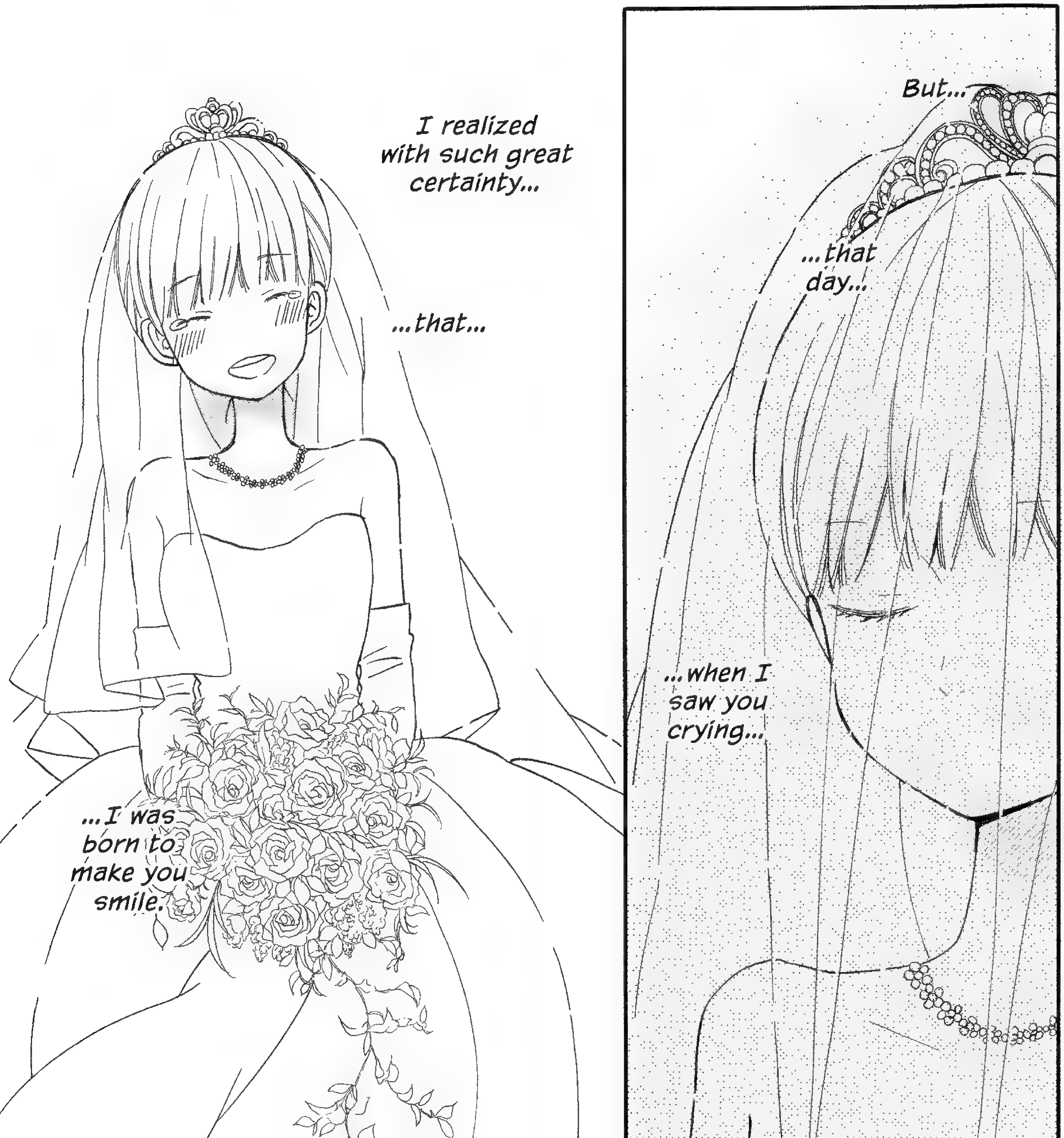
Kaito-kun.
It's strange how you hold back with me.
Be quiet, Kaito!
You finally said it!
Dumbo Kaito!
Hmph.
I don't mind being called a dumbo.
I like you, Yuzuno.

Yuzuno.

I never...

...ever...

...thought about what I was living for before.


But...
...that day...
...when I saw you crying...
I realized with such great certainty...
...that...
...I was born to make you smile.

She's so cute!
Mao is so cute!
ちゅっ SMOOCH
My little fairy! My angel!
ちゅっ SMOOCH
Mao is a weird name.
After I married Yuzuno...
...I worked frantically...
...every single day for the two of us.
It was *Kukai's name as a child.
Daddy's gotta go now! Bye!
I never noticed that Yuzuno was unhappy.

*A famous Buddhist monk.

I made it home earlier than usual today.
I wonder if Mao is already asleep.
I'll surprise her with the teddy bear by placing it on her pillow.
I'll surprise Yuzuno, too.
It's Christmas, after all.
...
Hey...

What are you doing here?
I felt nauseous.
In our home where Mao slept...
...in the bed I slept in...
...of all the men, she was with him...

When did it start?
A little after we got married.
You're copping quite an attitude.
I won't make excuses.
You're never around.
Not for me, and not for Mao!
...

Is Mao...
...my child?
Of course she is!
You can do a test if you want!
Aah...
Everything...
...went black.

Don't you need to go home?
No, it's fine.
No one is waiting for me.
Days went on without me going home.
I didn't want to go home.
You're mean, Daddy.
You promised not to make Mommy cry.
But you're never home...
...and Mommy is always crying.

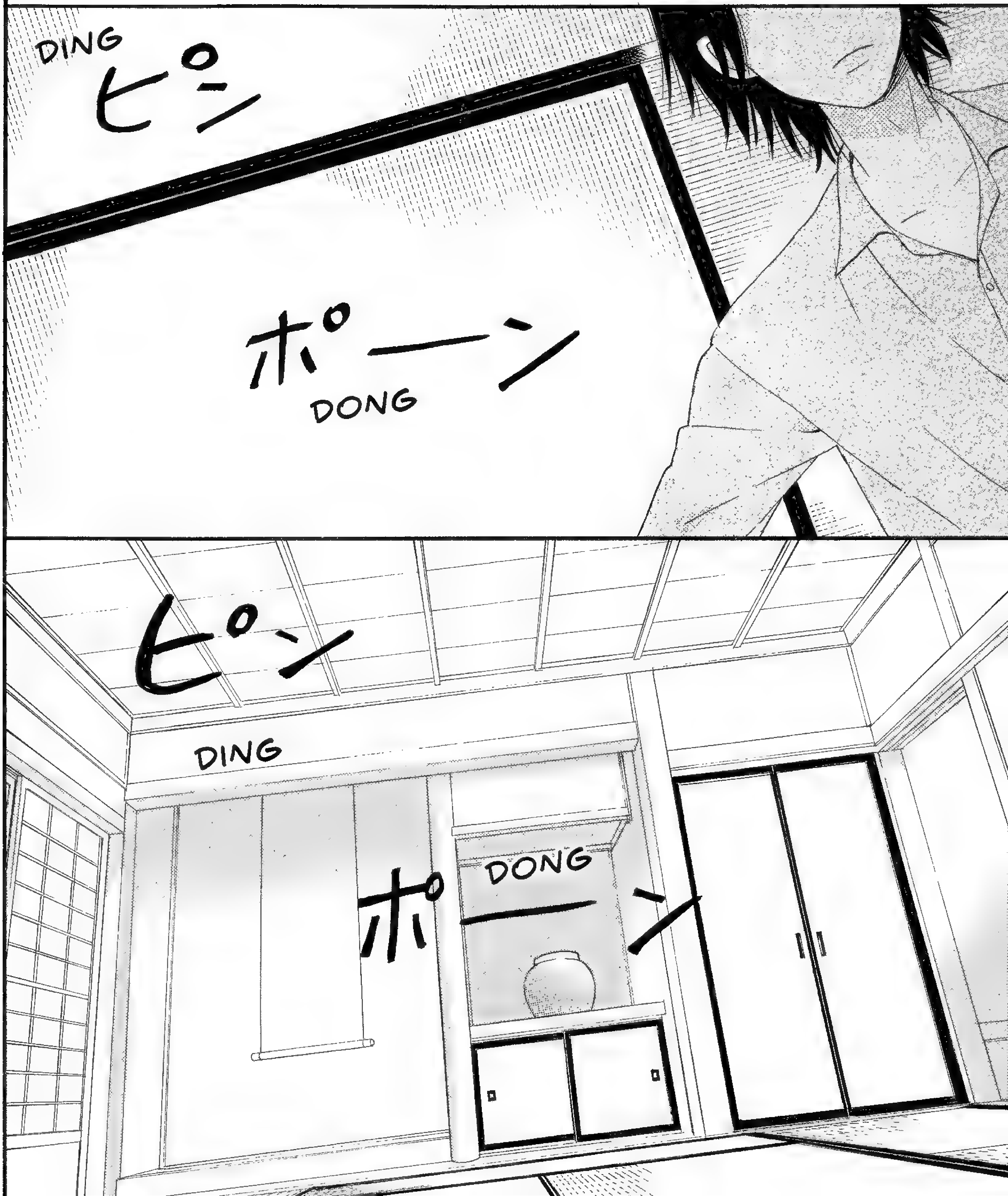
Don't you know that Mommy gets super lonely?
You're blaming me, too?
...
I...
...didn't say anything.
I was just looking at you.
...
Daddy?
Guess it was a hallucination...
I'm having paranoid delusions!

FIDGET
もじ
What?
If you want to say something, say it.
Don't look at me like that!
FLINCH
No...
No.

Mao...
I have to believe in her... I have to!
The more I stayed away, the more she fell out of love with me.
Before long, Yuzuno packed up her bags and left our home.
At that man's request, she left Mao behind.
What a foolish woman.
She was repeating the same mistake.
Yet, her foolishness...
...was something I loved about her in the past.
Mao.
I felt so bad for you.

You were born to that foolish woman and the idiot that I am.
You had to put up with us your whole life.
I don't think you ever once reproached me.
To be honest, I was surprised when you packed up your bags and left.
But I know you'll be happier without me.
ピンポーン
DING DONG
I...
...still...
ピンポーーン
DING DONG

...didn't have the courage to give you my love, so I left you in the care of someone who could.


ピン
DING
ポーン
DONG
ピン
DING
ポーン
DONG

...
So annoying...
Who is that?
Nice to meet you!
My name is Oda. I'm Mao's classmate.
You came to see Mao?
Is it urgent?
Um... Yes.
Are you her boyfriend?
Ummmm...
Um, well...
Not exactly.
But you do like her?
Um... Um, I guess?
I see. I see.

She's living at this address.
Huh?
Take good care of her, okay?
Why... isn't she living...
バタン
SLAM
...
Nakamura-san.
Is that a relative?
...

Was that Mao's friend?
Seems like it.
You were talking about Mao-chan in your sleep again.
...
Hmph.

CRACK
コキッ
It's a miracle I got off work on time.
At this rate, I'll be able to go to...
...the fireworks festival.
Ever since that incident at Mao's workplace...
...it seems like Sugimoto-san has been avoiding me.
Mao is acting normal, but...
...something must've happened.
ガチャ
KERCHAK

Hey!
ばっ
JOLT
W...
What...

What are you doing at the Nakamura house?
What do you mean?
Let's go somewhere else.
Why are you here?
Moto-miya's...
Motomiya's father...
...told me she was living here.

Is that what her father said?
Yes.
Darn him.
How can he be so casual about it?!
It's not normal for a girl to live with a man...
Doesn't he care what people think of Mao?
...

Don't tell her what her father said.
Why not?
It'll hurt Mao's feelings.
Are you Nakamura-san?
Motomiya really lives here...
You can ask Mao about it if she ever brings it up.
But for today, could you please just leave?
Nothing will get resolved just by waiting around! I want to help her!

Please go.
...
SIGH
ほ,
Okay.
Thanks.
Just tell me one thing.
Are you going to return Motomiya's feelings?

...
Hey! Say something!
You're selfish!
...
Anything...
...
Good-bye.
Oda-kun.
Hey!
Darn it!

I'm home!
Welcome back, Hiro.
Hiro, you gotta defend me!
HIDE
What am I defending you from?
Daiki! He keeps pressuring me to play video games.
But I need to get dinner ready.
Daiki, give her a break.
You'll get used to her cooking soon enough.
But I'm on a losing streak...

パタン
SLAM
That's what it is?
Guess you forgot how good she is at video games.
He's not even listening.
Oh, Mao.
It looks like I'll be able to make it to the fireworks festival.
Huh?
I'll look for my mother's *yukata*.
I'll just wear regular clothes.
You can wear a *yukata* if you want.
We can't walk around together like that!
...
The *yukata* will be much happier being worn than stored away.
Happy? The *yukata*?
EEK
EEK

Yeah. So don't worry about it and just wear it.
Okay?
...
Okay.
That hurts.
Right now, I can't...
...return Mao's feelings.
Her idiot father entrusted her to me, after all.
But...

I do...
...want Mao...
...to have eyes only for me.
What that boy said is true.
I am selfish.

story 16

Summer Festival

Wow!
This brings back memories!
Just folding this looks like a pain.
What is this thing for? It has a seal.
I'll look it up online.
カチ TAP
カチ TAP
カチ TAP
It's a *korin* belt. So the kimono doesn't come loose.
How did you know that, Daiki?
I use it at work.
Amazing, Daiki!

That's not good, Daiki.
So what?
That's why Daiki is popular with customers. But our coworkers don't like him 'cause he says things like "so what."
I'll go to Chi-chan's house to practice putting it on.
Yeah.
It's such a special *yukata*.
Thanks, you two.
What time are we going to the graveyard?
We're leaving at 10:00 AM.
We still have time, then.

Mao! Let's play a game!
He's at it again...
Don't look at me like that!
I'm going to Chi-chan's house, so I can't.
Right now?
Mao, did you already promise her?
I was gonna tell her now.
In that case, come with us to the graveyard.

It's okay, right, Daiki?
You want her to come, too, right?
Whatever you want.
I ended up coming.
I've wanted to pay my respects all this time.

Some-one...
... brought flowers...
Hina?
WHOOSH
ばっ
さわ…
SILENCE
SILENCE
さわ…

Hiro?
Never mind.
Hm Hm
...
Thank you for watching over me.
Your two sons are sooooo good to me!
They are amazing people.
I promise I'll return their kindness one day.
I'm sorry for impudently staying in your home!
Especially when Hina hasn't returned home yet.
Oh! I'm borrowing your yukata, too! I'll be careful with it!
Mao...
She's not a god that you make wishes to, you know.
Is that what you thought I was doing?

Argh! I can't do it!
Mom, you do it!
Chi-chan, don't be so fussy!
Wow!
It can't be helped.
How about you, Mao-chan?
What? I tried so hard...
DOOM
ズン
Oh, my, you need help.
It's no good at all!
It's difficult, after all.
It sure is.
There, there.
Ah, I see.
Okay, all done!
You're next, Mao-chan.

I'm fine!
It's okay.
Let me take care of you today.
You can come over another day to practice.
Huh?
You're so skinny! Are you eating enough?
Yes, I am.

It's strange...
I suddenly...
...miss...
Here you go.
...my mom.
Hey... Mao...
I think I'll invite Oda-kun to the fireworks festival.

Okay!
Okay!
Okay! Can you hold my hand while I call?
Let's take a deep breath, Chi-chan!
BREATH スーハー
BREATH スーハー
ピ BEEP
Argh! I'm so nervous!
Now I'm nervous, too.
Here I go...
Hello?
ドキ BA-DUMP
ドキ BA-DUMP
Oda-kun?
Yeah, it's me.
Oh? It's nothing special.
I just figured you weren't doing anything.
BA-DUMP ドキ
ドキ BA-DUMP
So, the fireworks festival is today.
I was planning on going with Mao, but she's already made plans to go with her family.
Chi-chan is being tricky...

Her family?
...
It's fine if you don't want to go, though...
She should try being more direct.
Going by myself might be fun, actually.
Huh? Going with someone is definitely more fun.
What are you talking about?
...
Where do you want to meet? What time?

Mao...
He said he'll come!
You did it!
ぎゅううう SQUEEZE
Yeah.
I hope that Oda-kun...
...takes notice quickly...
...of Chi-chan's feelings.
あわ FLUSTER
Is my *yukata* okay? Does it look weird?
What's wrong?
You're fine! You look great!
あわ FLUSTER
あわ FLUSTER
あわ FLUSTER
But! But! But!
You'll feel just like this before you see Hiro-san!

Daiki.
Hiro isn't here yet?
He didn't text you either?
Yeah.
...
What?
ぷうりば
Hmph.
You look pretty nice in that *yukata*.
Chi-chan's mom helped me put it on.
I see.
If you knew how to put on a *kimono* that well yourself, you could get a part-time job dressing up as Chon-mame.
I want to see that!
I'm just kidding, you know.

Oh, it's Hiro.
RING RING
プルルルッ
Hello?
BA-DUMP
ドキ
There's no way you can make it?
BA-DUMP
ドキ
I understand.
BA-DUMP
ドキ
Hiro can't get in touch with his client, so he won't be able to come.
What?
He said he's sorry and not to worry about him since he can see the fireworks a little from his office.

ドン
BOOM
BOOM
ドドン
ドン
BOOM
If hanging out with me is that awful, we can go home.
I don't mind hanging out with you.
Let's go.
コポ
SLOSH
コポ
SLOSH
コポ
SLOSH
Why did this have to happen today...
I wish the client would just call...

Hi...
たたたたっ
TMP TMP TMP
Sugimoto-san!
Why have you been avoiding me?
I'm not avoiding you.
...
BOOM
ドーン
It started.
ドドン
BOOM
I was supposed to go see the fireworks with my brother and sister.

Your...
... sister?
That's not what she is.
Sugimoto-san, I'm sorry if I did anything to offend you.
Please don't hesitate to tell me what it is.
You didn't do anything!
Then please don't avoid me.
I'm not avoiding you!
Then, is it because you're still uncomfortable?
About your online novel?
About that...
I really like it.
I love how you talk about your family so warmly.

My family...
You thought it was about my family?
I was writing about the person I like.
What? Really?
That's right! Please read it again!
I really like...
...what was written.
It gave me courage.
BOOM

You got courage?
I love how it makes me feel!
I like that style, and the color of the font! It's so easy to read!
Takashi is so cool!
Sugi-moto-san suddenly sounds excited.
Oh!
Excuse me!
たたた TMP TMP TMP
Kukai-san.

Even though...
...I know it would be bad for him to find out about Kukai-san...
A part of me...
...also wants...
...Nakamura-san...
...to take notice...
...even if just a little.
Now...
I...
...don't know what to do...
...anymore.

BOOM
ドーン
BOOM
ドーンッ
Oh!
It's beautiful.
GROWL
ぐ～
That was loud.
I'm hungry.
I'll go buy cotton candy.
That'll just fill you up with air.
Wait up.
You might get lost, so I'll go with you. It'd be hard to try to meet up in this crowd.

ZOOM
Mao, wait right there!
I'll call you soon.
Huh?
How will we find each other?
And there's still a chance that Hiro will show up.
GRAB

I'm sorry!
Stay a little behind me.
?
?
Hina!

ドドーン
BOOM
ドーン
BOOM

...
Dai-chan...
Is that your date?
What?
This is Mao! Don't you recognize her?
I asked because it's her.
How's that?
It's been a long time, Mao-chan.
Yes, it has.
ぶり
Truly.
Hina-chan is different from what I imagined.
Hiro is worried about you.
If you're gonna be in the area, you could at least stop by to say hi.

That yukata...
Oh, I'm sorry...
It suits you. The yukata...
Yes, the yukata...
Hina!
Listen to me!
I don't want to move back home.
ドン
BOOM
I won't move back.

Don't follow me.
...
BOOM
ドンッ
Mao.

Don't tell Hiro.
He'll just worry.
Okay.
ドドーンッ
BOOM
Oh! Nakamura!
He's with a girl!
I heard you were back.
It's been a while.
Wow! You're all here.
Good evening, Daiki's girlfriend.

!
She's not my girlfriend! Not this crazy short girl!
Daiki, you're a four-eyed lanky monster!
See?
I'm sorry... I started this...
ペコリ…
NOD
Oh, look, it's Aoi-kun from work!
So you two met at work?
You're just starting to date?
Daiki, you're so cold.
That's not it at all!
Hey!
So you two are dating?

Hiro!
Hiro!
I made it!
You're late!
Sorry.
Oh, good evening, Hiro. I'll take Daiki off your hands.
Go ahead.
Mao, let's go for a walk.
Daiki, we'll be by that stand.

Nakamura, he stole your girlfriend!
...
大判焼
大
カラン
CLANK
コロン
CLUNK
Ah... はっ
Is everything still in place?
Do I look okay?
Sorry I was late.

*Octopus dumplings

*Frankfurt sausages

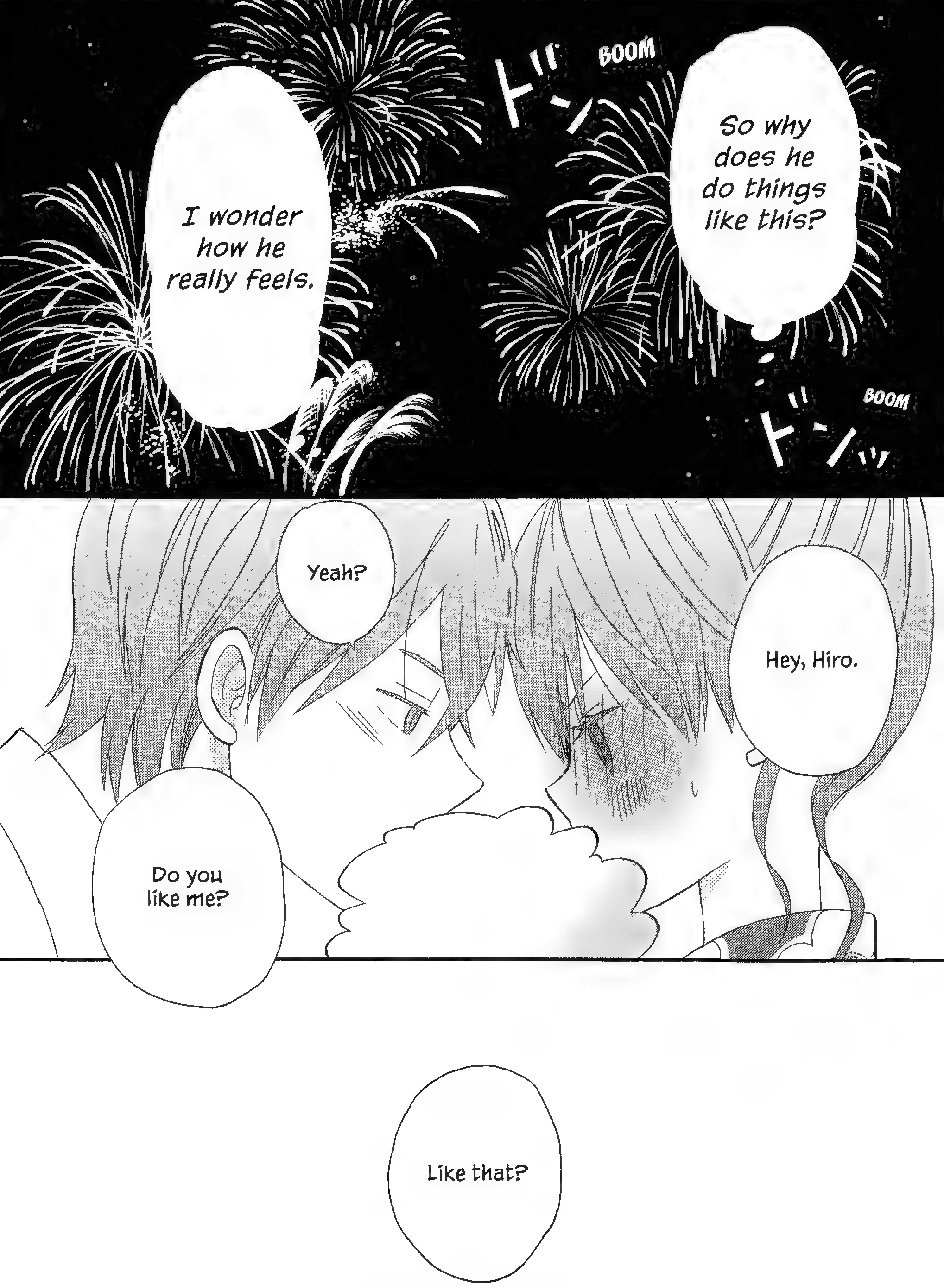
I wasn't waiting for you.
But Daiki was.
Oh, just Daiki, huh?
Want to eat something?
Cotton candy!
I thought you didn't like sweets.
Huh? I like candy.
Why are you saying that with an attitude?
わたあめ 500円
Here you go.
もぐ MUNCH
もぐ MUNCH
もぐ MUNCH
好み焼 500
んず飴

Don't look at me like that. I won't give you any.
I'm not looking at the cotton candy.
You look nice in that *yukata*.
What?
It's kind of embarrassing to say something like that.
I don't look nice! And I still won't give you any cotton candy!
You do look nice. And I do want some cotton candy.

ドン
BOOM
ドドンッ
BOOM
ドンッ
BOOM
...
Hiro.
Um...
Yeah?
I'm glad I could give my thanks...
ドドンッ
BOOM
...to your mom and dad.
Thank you.
ドン
BOOM

Yeah.
...
Fine, I'll give you some cotton candy.
What's gotten into you?
I just feel like it now.
Really?
ガブ
CHOMP
You like it?
It's so sweet!

CHOMP
ガブッ
…
ドドッ
BOOM
ドドッ
BOOM
Hiro…
He…
…doesn't like me like that, right?


ドーン
BOOM
So why does he do things like this?
I wonder how he really feels.
ドーンッ
BOOM
Hey, Hiro.
Yeah?
Do you like me?
Like that?

To be continued...

EXTRA CHAPTER Female Melancholy

There's something...
...that I want.
...
Oda-kun, tell me your phone number.
Okay.
Me, too.
...
How can they ask him so casually?

The truth is, I, too...
...want his phone number, that small link to him.
Why did I have to fall for such a popular guy?
Mao seems like she doesn't know the first thing about love, so that makes it hard to ask her for advice.
Chi-chan. Isn't this cute?
All right, it's decided! We'll have a café booth at the cultural festival.
Chi-chan
Oda-kun
Oda-kun and Chi-chan, you're in charge of shopping.
What...
JOB

Thanks for working with me, Chihiro.
What?
I'm worried about working with you.
Woah!
What does that mean? I'm the one who should be worried.
Since I'm worried, can we exchange contact info?
Eeek!
Huh? Who knows what kind of prank you'll use it for.
Ah! What am I saying?!
Fine then, nevermind.
むっ
SULK

See you later.
Why...
Why did I say that when I want his number?
I'm such an idiot...
1-B

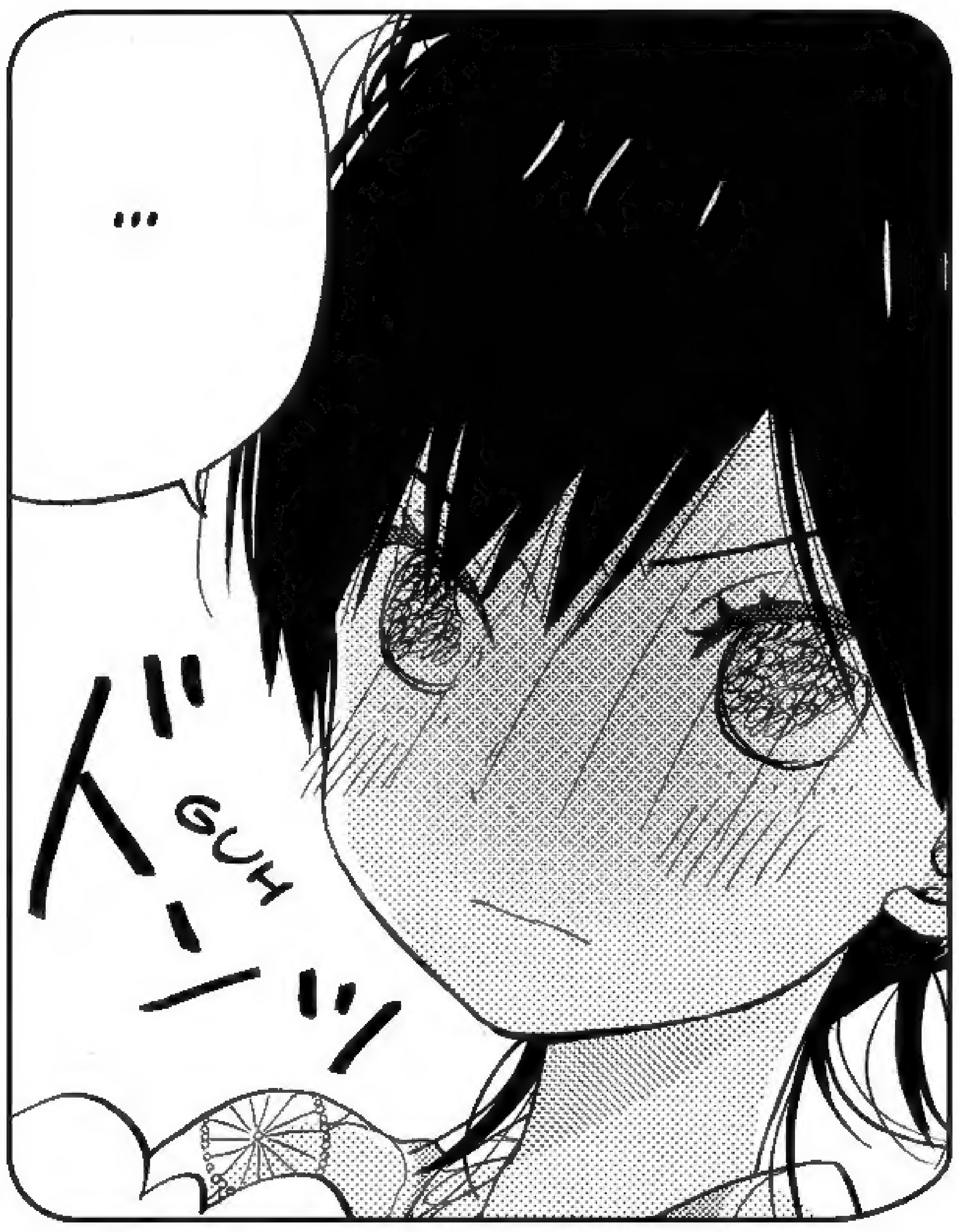
When are we going shopping?
Oh...
You're not mad at me?
No, I'm not.
Besides, even if you don't like it, we still have to work together, you know?
Where should we go? What's the cheapest place to shop?
I know a cheap place.
Because I cook a lot.
Really? You don't look the type.
I want to try some of your...
What! No way!
What are you talking about, you idiot!
Oh, no... I'm doing it again!
Um... It's fine if you want to call me an idiot, but...
Here.
ぽて
DAZE

Huh?
My phone number.
I think it's better if you have it just in case, after all.
You don't have to call me.
I'll call you!
Huh? Okay.
I did it!

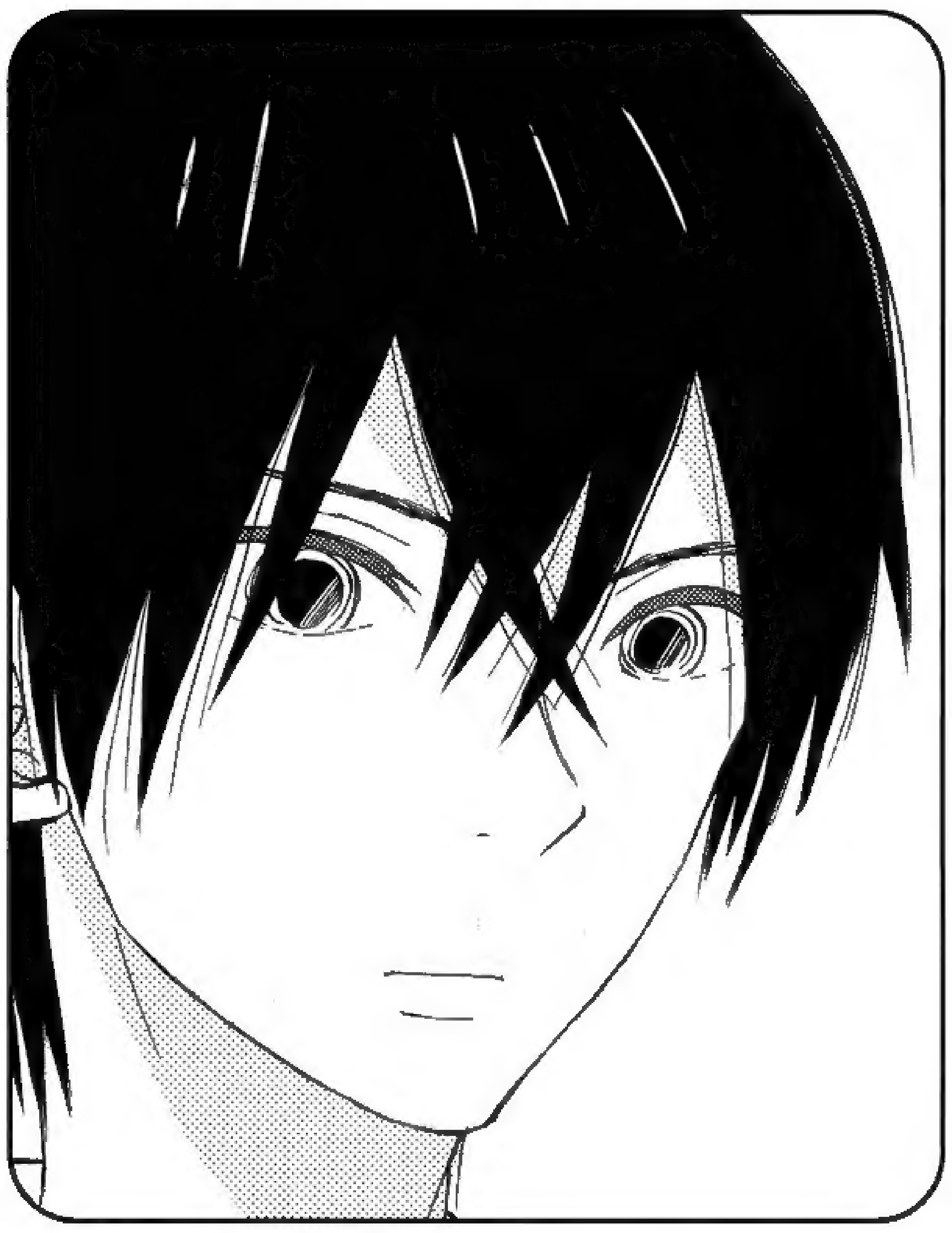
End of extra chapter

Next volume Announcement

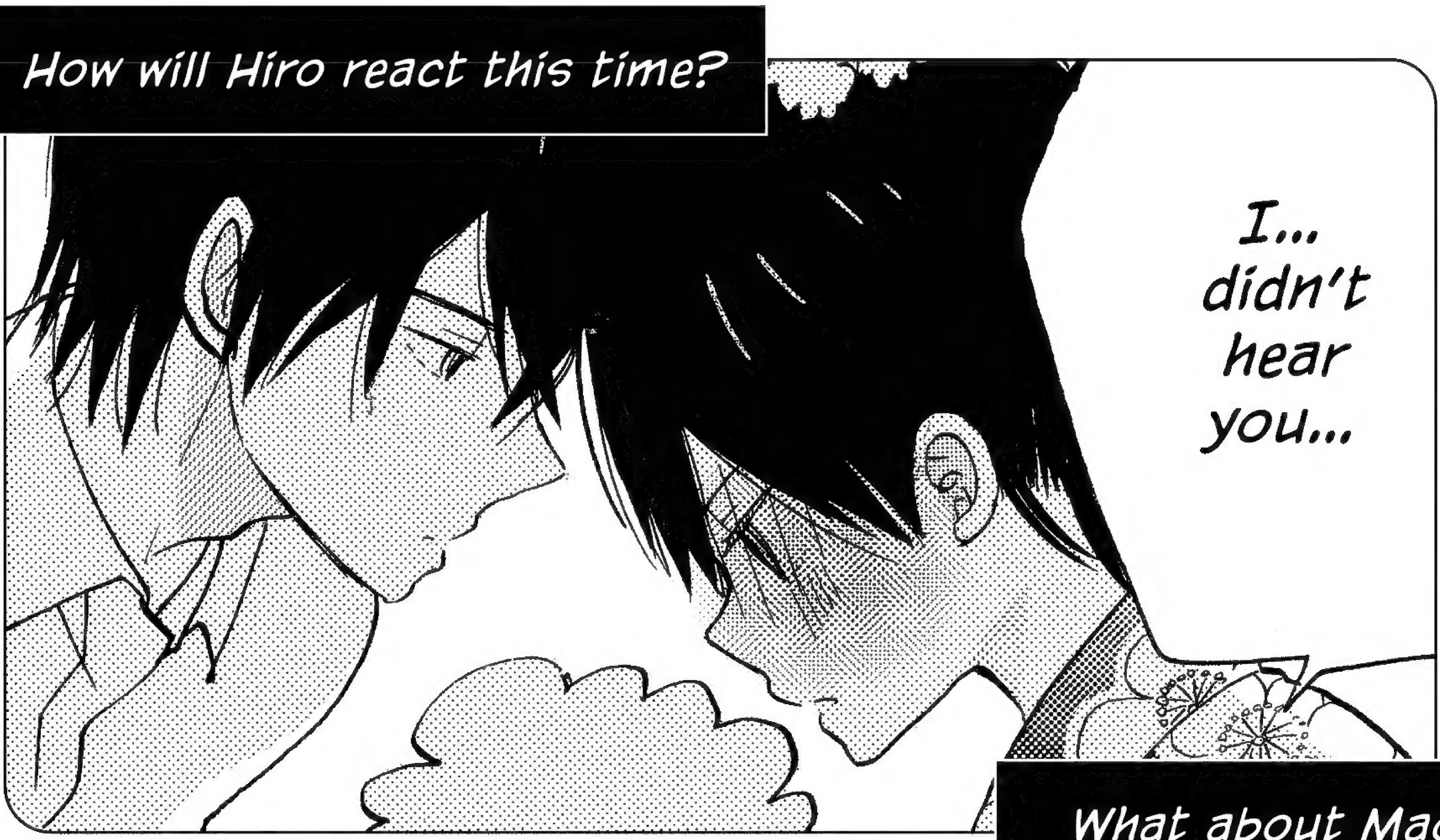
All right!



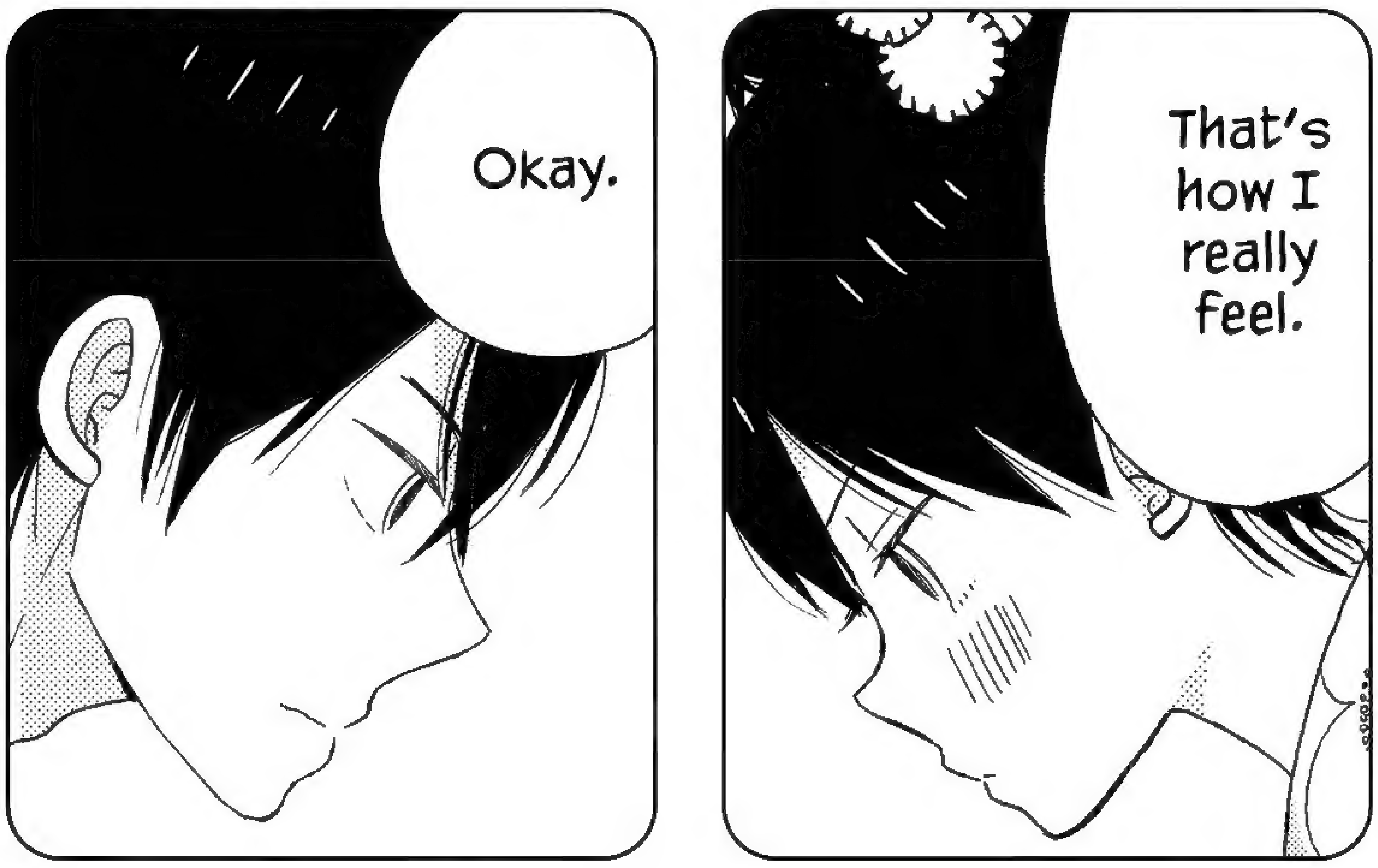
Mao's feelings come pouring out again.



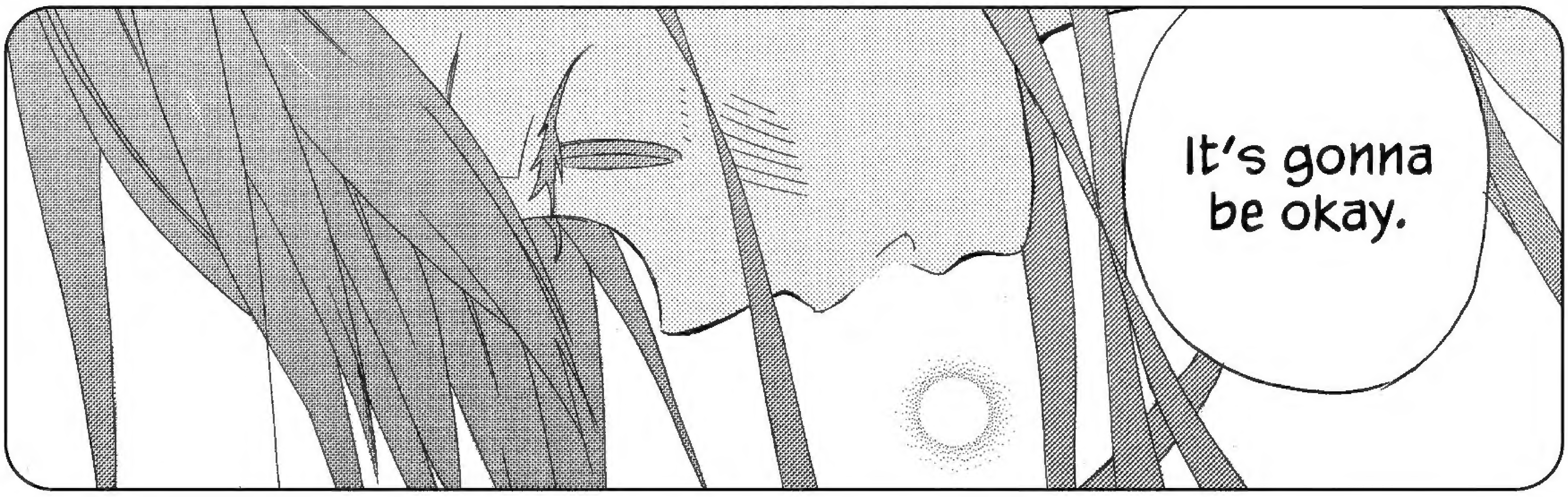
How will Hiro react this time?


I... didn't hear you...

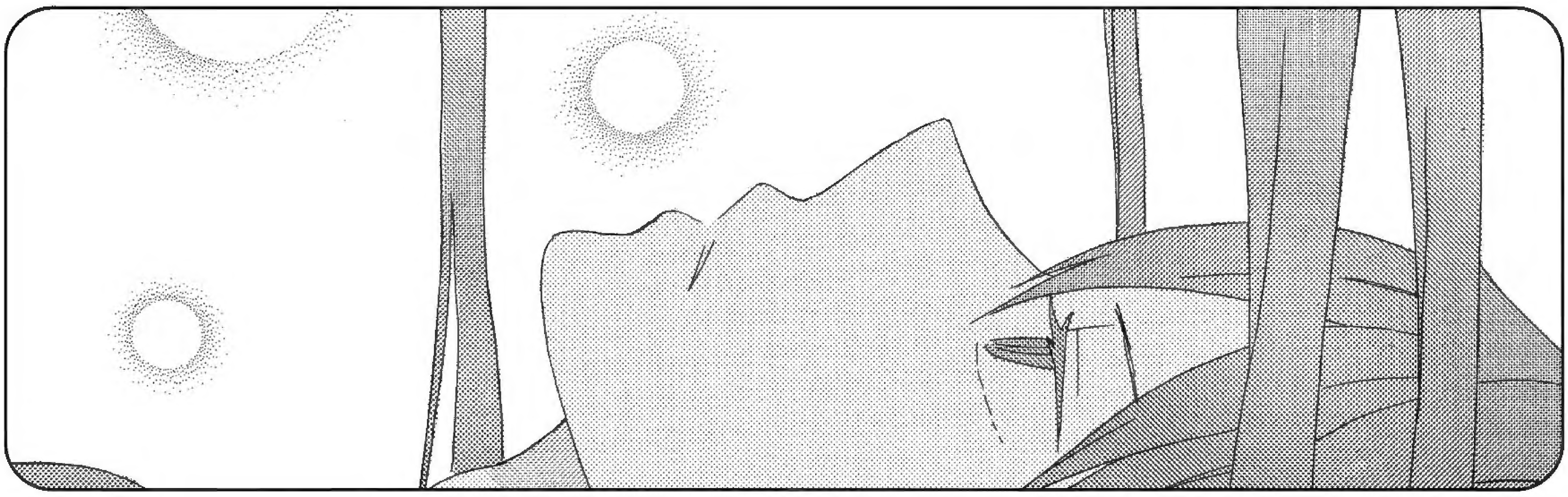
What about Mao?


That's how I really feel.
Okay.

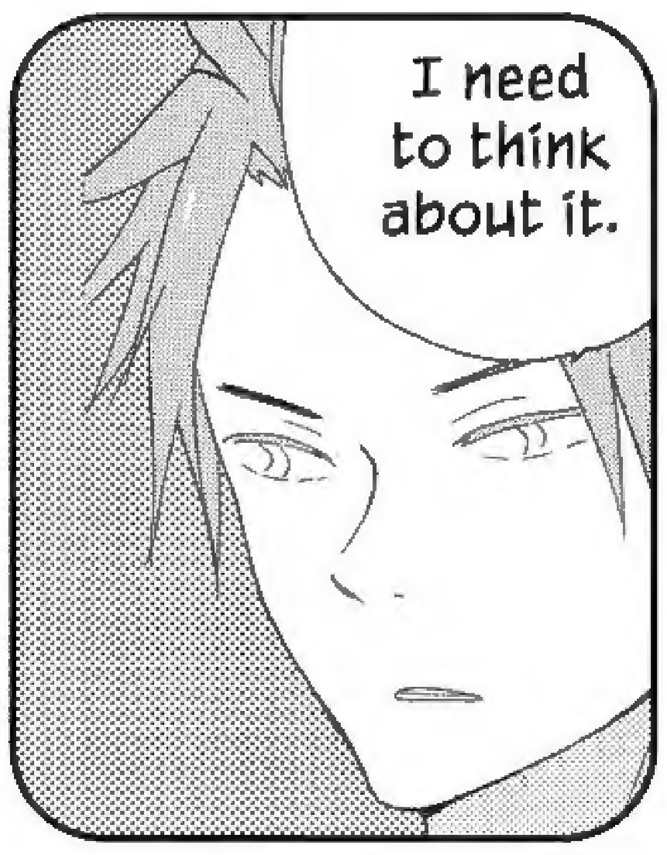
For these two who share strong feelings for one another, something's about to change.


It's gonna be okay.

Will Mao and Hiro's relationship change in Volume Five?



Or will something else happen?


I need to think about it.

He...
He's hurting, too...

Everyone's feelings are entangled. Will more drama ensue?

HOUSE of the SUN 5

Popular right now!

Do your best, Mao!

House of the Sun 4

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